

This past weekend witnessed a small increase in island visitors because of the official observance of George Washington's birthday on Monday. To put our recent island history into perspective William Howard (my great-great-great-great grandfather) was about thirty-two years old when George Washington was born. William Howard purchased Ocracoke Island seventeen years before the Declaration of Independence was adopted. Needless to say, the island has seen many changes since then.

In our last posting I included transcripts of my great-grandfather's shipwreck reports. Below is a photograph of James Howard and his wife, Zilphia, at about the time he was keeper of the Hatteras Inlet Life Saving Station in the late 1800's.



James and Zilphia's daughter, Sabra Howard, was my grandfather's sister. She married Dan Tolson and they built their new house "down point" near the Ocracoke Lighthouse. This old island home, as well as another nearby, is now owned by Katherine Rondthaler Woodwell and is one of the traditional older houses available for weekly rental that is full of character and charm.

This house sits at the end of a narrow, unpaved road on a secluded lot. It looks and feels much as it did many years ago because none of the surrounding property has been developed. Although Theodore and Alice Rondthaler purchased the house in the 1930's my father still refers to it as "Uncle Dan's." It is comfortable, cozy and charming although it does not have central heat or air conditioning. It does have a large front porch that looks out on the marsh and a narrow private foot path that leads directly to the sound. One of the most picturesque views of the lighthouse is from this path.

Songbirds abound in the yard and the night air is saturated with the sounds of untold numbers of tiny tree frogs, especially after a summer rain. The house has no television or telephones but beckons the vacationer to relax with an absorbing book or invites the family to sit down around the table for a game of cards or scrabble.

Joe Bell lived nearby at one time and is buried on the property. If you have noticed the

small red and yellow wild flowers that grow profusely in the sandy soil on the Outer Banks you may enjoy the story of Joe Bell and how he brought the flowers to Ocracoke. Look for this touching story in a future newsletter.

If “the Rondthaler House” sounds like the type of vacation home that interests you please contact Katherine directly. Her address is 64 Church, Woods Hole, MA 02543. Her phone number is 508-548-0680 (evenings & weekends).

Saturday was warm and windy. The surf was rough. Every incoming wave brought in quivering foam that reminded me of meringue on a lemon pie. Seagulls congregated in groups on the beach with all heads turned into the wind. When the waves are large and numerous it is almost impossible to spot dolphins. Maybe they stay out further where it is calmer, but they will be back.

Plans are underway for the Howard Street Arts and Crafts Fair on Saturday, May 27, Memorial Day Weekend (check here for details later) as well as an auction to raise money for the Wesley Hospitality House in Elizabeth City.

The Hospitality House will serve out-of-town residents who have relatives at Albemarle Hospital. Plans are to designate an “Ocracoke Room” and to decorate it with arts and crafts from the island. Because it is often an economic hardship for Ocracoke residents to rent motel rooms when relatives are hospitalized this will be a welcome service for us. Ocracoke Civic and Business Association, Inc. is sponsoring the fund-raiser.

I received one response to this newsletter asking me to include some Ocracoke photos to remind her of the island during the long cold northern winters. I am not much of a photographer but I will try my hand at this before too long.

Don't forget to peruse our February Specials page (just click on the link at the top left of our site). This month features kitchen items. Next month we will feature 10% off on all baskets.

Until next time, relax and enjoy life. It will help you get ready for your next visit to the Outer Banks.

Philip and staff at Village Craftsmen